



Navy ship transfer risks health of Sinclair Inlet; Puget Sound

Decommissioned aircraft carrier hull scraping would discharge toxics into local waters

Jan 6, 2017, BREMERTON – Today the United States Navy began scraping the hull of a mothballed aircraft carrier in Sinclair Inlet just outside Bremerton, WA disregarding pollution-control measures and without obtaining a discharge permit from the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

Up to 73 dump truck loads of hull waste material is estimated to be openly discharged to marine water and sediment if the hull scraping is allowed to proceed around what is currently a Superfund Cleanup Site. The area around the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard has seen significant public funds spent to restore and remediate decades of contamination. “Our local Navy base has a duty to be a good neighbor and caretaker for the Sound. Sinclair Inlet is still on the path to recovery after years of neglect,” said Mindy Roberts, Puget Sound Director for the Washington Environmental Council. “We question why this is happening in a hurry to prepare a vessel for towing to Texas when we have the facilities to dismantle ships here with proper controls.”

Sinclair Inlet is on the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list of impaired waters. Monitoring indicates that the sediment in Sinclair Inlet is not yet within healthy ranges for copper, and actions are needed to clean up existing contamination to protect marine organisms.

For the next 30 days, divers will be physically removing hull waste containing marine organisms and harmful copper based paints. Copper-based paints were used specifically to reduce marine life growing on hulls because copper coatings slowly leach toxic dissolved copper into the waters around the vessel. Even in very small quantities, copper is toxic to salmon and marine life farther down the food chain.

“No other boat owner or operator in Puget Sound, no matter how big or small, would be allowed to discharge hull waste in open water without containment. It pollutes marine water and sediment with toxic substances. I don’t know why the Navy believes it shouldn’t be held to the same standards as everyone else when it comes to protecting fisheries and Puget Sound. This isn’t just the Tribe’s concern, it should be a public concern,” said Leonard Forsman, Chairman of the Suquamish Tribe.

Hull cleaning operations are typically conducted in a dry dock facility where contaminated wastes can be collected and properly treated and disposed. The Navy began its hull cleaning operation despite not being authorized by the Clean Water Act, the Vessel General Permit for Discharges Incidental to the



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Normal Operation of Vessels (VGP), or the proposed rule for the Uniform National Discharge Standards for Vessels of the Armed Forces.

The Ex-Independence has been at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard for 19 years and will be towed to Brownsville, Texas for dismantling. Navy regulations require the hull be cleaned prior to its transfer to Brownsville, Texas in order to prevent invasive species travelling with the ship.

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